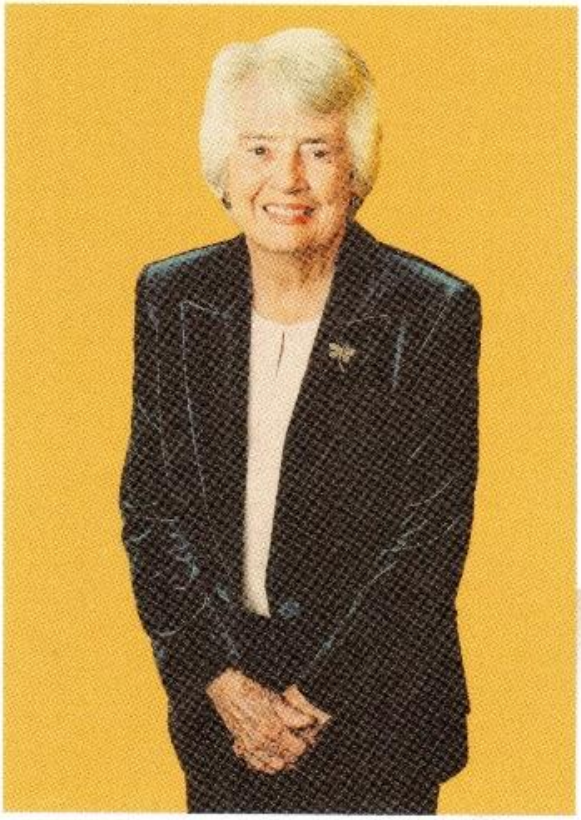


Patricia McGowan Wald

September 16, 1928 – January 12, 2019

Born into an Irish-Catholic working class family in Connecticut, Patricia Ann McGowan Wald committed her life to ensuring that America's legal system fairly represented those who needed it most. She was the first member of her family to attend college, graduating from Connecticut College and then Yale Law School as one of only a handful of women in her class. During her early years practicing law she advocated for systemic changes to our criminal and juvenile justice, mental health, poverty and civil rights policies. Always, her focus was on protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

As her career evolved she broke longstanding gender barriers, becoming an Assistant Attorney General of the United States, a Federal Judge and the first woman Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. In doing so, she paved the way for generations of women (and men) to forge successful and meaningful careers. She was awarded 20 honorary degrees, accepted 5 Presidential appointments and in 2013 received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

She was a fiercely loyal wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and friend. She raised five children with her husband of 58 years, Bob Wald, a fellow Yale Law School classmate, who was her biggest champion and fan. We loved her sharp sense of humor and ever-present laugh as much as she loved family gatherings at the beach, singing Broadway musicals, traveling the world, and a good political debate on any issue. A scholar, pioneer, and trailblazer, she leaves a more just and inclusive world, and a legacy of friendship, love, support and counsel to colleagues, friends, and family.

Remembrances:

Hon. David S. Tatel

Alexandra Victor Edsall

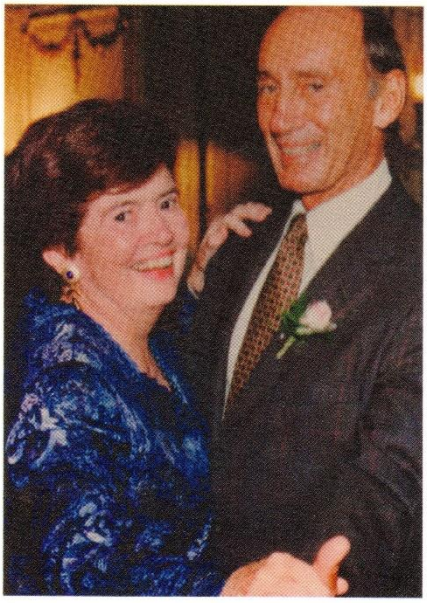
Hon. Paul A. Engelmayer

Jodie Zeldes Bernstein

Sarah Wald

Douglas Wald

Johanna Wald

Freddi Wald

Tom Wald